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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 002217

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [KISL](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: PHILIPPINE PEACE PANEL CHAIR OUTLINES UPCOMING
TALKS WITH MILF

REF: MANILA 2198 (CHARGE DISCUSSES PEACE PROSPECTS
TERRORISM WITH MILF LEADER)

Classified By: Ambassador Kristie A. Kenney, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: The Charge d'Affaires met Department of Foreign Affairs Undersecretary and Peace Process Chair Rafael Seguis October 15 to discuss the Philippine government's expectations for planned informal talks later this month in Kuala Lumpur with leaders of the southern Philippines separatist group Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). Seguis described the upcoming October 27 meeting as a chance for the parties to conclude a framework agreement on the protection of civilian populations, discuss the return of internally displaced persons, address the status of detained MILF commanders, and compare their short lists of countries to be invited to join the International Contact Group (ICG), a new mechanism that resulted from last month's round of informal talks. While Seguis did not formally invite the U.S. to join the ICG, his staff informed us later that the U.S. was on the Philippines' short list of suggested participants, though the Philippines would not propose the U.S. unless the MILF also desired this. The Charge also informed Seguis about our intention to visit MILF headquarters in Mindanao to show our support for the peace process (reftel). END SUMMARY.

CIVILIAN PROTECTION AGREEMENT ON THE TABLE

¶2. (C) In an October 15 meeting with the Charge d'Affaires, Department of Foreign Affairs Undersecretary and Peace Process Chair Rafael Seguis said that upcoming talks next week in Kuala Lumpur with leaders of the separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) would address several key issues, including a framework agreement on the protection of civilian populations in conflict areas. The agreement, possibly to be modeled after a similar agreement reached for the southern Sudan conflict, would allow international fact-finding missions and monitors into Mindanao to examine protections for civilians under international humanitarian law. Seguis said the GRP would never agree to the MILF desire to involve foreign states in the protection of civilians, but the GRP could agree to a mechanism that would involve credible international NGOs. In a separate later conversation, Philippine Peace Panel Director Ryan Sullivan noted that while the MILF supports the creation of a new monitoring entity under this agreement, the Philippine government would prefer to incorporate fact-finding tasks within a renewed mandate for the existing International Monitoring Team (IMT).

INVITATIONS TO JOIN CONTACT GROUP

¶3. (C) The two sides would also work to agree on a single

list of proposed international members of the International Contact Group (ICG). Seguis noted the ICG would be ad hoc in nature; it might attend and observe GRP-MILF negotiations, offer advice, and draw in resource persons. Seguis suggested the ICG's role might later expand, with ICG members helping to implement an eventual peace agreement. He said that he envisioned that both the GRP and the MILF would approach countries they wanted to join the ICG, with the two sides' peace panels issuing joint invitations at the appropriate time. The DFA would issue invitations to foreign governments through a note verbale. Asked if the USG would want to join the ICG, the Charge suggested that the parties to the conflict should decide whether the USG's presence in the ICG would be helpful. She stressed that, whether in the ICG or not, the USG would continue support the peace process. The Charge noted that the Embassy would send a delegation to meet with the MILF the following day.

OTHER ISSUES ON THE AGENDA

14. (C) Undersecretary Seguis said that the two sides would also seek to resolve pending security issues, including the status of 10 detained MILF commanders. The two sides' suspension of military operations and actions in July was holding steady, Seguis reported. A significant clash in August on Basilan island, in which some MILF personnel fought alongside members of the Abu Sayyaf Group, represented an exception, he said. Seguis also hoped the two sides could make progress toward encouraging the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their home communities. Seguis noted approximately 20,000 people had recently returned to

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their homes, but around 200,000 remained displaced. He believed some MILF leaders were encouraging IDPs to remain in camps, in order to place pressure on the GRP to negotiate.

COMMENT

15. (C) It is unclear if the GRP and MILF will agree to invite the U.S. into the ICG during the upcoming informal talks. Ryan Sullivan has told us that President Arroyo agreed to include the U.S. on the list of countries the GRP would agree to invite. Sullivan also reported that Seguis said privately that the Philippines would not object to the MILF's nomination of the U.S. if it were to happen, but, out of concern that the U.S. would "dominate the process," Seguis was not intending to propose U.S. participation absent an MILF motion.

KENNEY